

Frequently Asked Questions Handout

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

How will the location of station stops be decided?

Because of the importance of reducing overall trip time, there will be a need to keep the number of station stops to a minimum. Population and ridership levels will be key factors in selecting stop locations. It is estimated that only communities with more than 50,000 residents will be able to generate enough ridership to justify a high-speed train stop. Depending on demand, smaller communities might be designated as limited stops where a reduced high-speed schedule would operate. It is likely that residents of smaller communities would have access to high-speed stops via continued conventional train service and/or connector bus service.

Will trains travel at 110 mph?

According to federal safety regulations, 110 mph is the maximum speed passenger trains are allowed to travel on rail segments that have at-grade crossings. To travel above 110 mph, the corridor would need to be completely grade separated (a very expensive and unlikely proposition). Trains will not travel at this maximum speed over the entire length of the corridors. Most likely they may only reach 110 mph for short distances along the corridor. Conditions such as track curvature or travel through urban areas might be reasons why trains would travel at lower than maximum speeds.

What are the proposed safety treatments at rail crossings?

Each situation will be analyzed separately according to the particular circumstances of the crossing. At a minimum, INDOT anticipates it will be necessary to have a crossing gate or gates that completely barricade any vehicle access across the rail line. Full barrier gates eliminate the chance for driver error by preventing vehicle access to the crossing. In some instances closure of crossings might be an appropriate solution, provided alternative access is readily available. If conditions merit the expense, new bridges could be another option.

Additional advance warning signs will also be a requirement, to make people very aware of the possibility of high-speed trains at a crossing. In addition to safety features for vehicles, pedestrian and bicycle activity will also be considered.

What other types of safety measures might be put in place?

Fencing along portions of the corridor could be put in place if future studies show it is necessary. In urban areas, the fencing could be of a decorative nature, designed in cooperation with local neighborhood and community groups. It would blend in with surrounding housing and local development while still enhancing the safety of the corridor by directing people to cross the tracks at designated crossings only. The fencing will not create a visual barrier for community residents.

Track improvements will include rebuilding the rail bed and providing heavy continuously welded rail. These improvements will allow trains to safely operate along

the corridor. A new state of the art positive train control (PTC) system will be installed along the entire corridor to ensure that both passenger and freight trains are properly separated from each other and to provide information to the train engineers on the status of warning devices at each grade crossing. If problems are detected, the trains can be automatically slowed or stopped.

How much will the proposed routes, stations, track improvements costs?

The cost for upgrading tracks (on a per-mile basis) varies depending on the particular circumstances of the corridor segment. Improving track through a largely flat, rural area with minimal crossings might cost \$500,000 per mile. In densely developed areas, the cost could be significantly greater. Current estimates show the approximate cost for corridor development through Indiana averaging out to slightly more than \$1 million per mile. Congress is currently considering a plan to provide federal funding through guaranteed bonding authority for Amtrak to sell up to \$12 billion in bonds on the private market over a ten year period. Funding would be provided at an 80% federal / 20% state ratio. In instances where corridors serve two or more states, an equitable split of the 20% state match would be needed. For example, while the route from Chicago to Cincinnati would serve around 2 million people in the greater Cincinnati area, only about 15 miles of the 300-mile Chicago to Cincinnati corridor is in Ohio. Indiana and Ohio would need to determine a fair way to split the state costs for service on this line.

How will Indiana cover the costs for these capital projects?

To date, there have been no decisions made as to how the state of Indiana might pay for potential high-speed rail improvements or whether the high-speed system will even be built. Any funding decision for high-speed rail improvements would need to be supported by the general public and the finance strategy would need to be approved by the state legislature.

How will the Railroads be involved?

The freight railroads are aware of the preliminary planning that has occurred related to the possible future use of rail lines for high-speed passenger rail services. A primary condition of any plans for the Midwest system has been that there will be no negative impact on freight rail service due to the additional passenger services. Any plans for improvements to permit passenger trains would need to be authorized and developed in accordance with the owning freight railroad.

What is Amtrak's involvement in the planning and implementation of passenger rail service improvements in Indiana and the region?

Amtrak has been a partner with the nine states that have been investigating plans for improved passenger rail services in the Midwest. They have been involved in the discussions and have helped provide information about passenger rail operations and their experiences relating to improving services for higher speeds on the east and west coasts. There has been no commitment however that Amtrak will be the operator of any future Midwest service.

Plans will have taken current and future levels of freight service on rail lines into account. If passenger rail service were to begin on a line, an understanding of the operational

characteristics would need to be reached with the freight railroad that owns the line. Additional rail sidings or possibly long segments of additional parallel tracks would need to be built to allow freight services to remain unaffected. If freight levels are not particularly high, which could be the case for several segments being considered in Indiana, changes of this type might only be minimal. Some freight operations might be shifted to off-peak passenger times (over-night or early morning hours) if that was deemed the best approach by all involved. Decisions of this type would be discussed at future environmental hearings if plans advance to that stage.

Who will have the responsibility of maintenance of the areas next to the track, specifically regarding trash, right-of-way maintenance, fencing, etc.?

The passenger railroad owning or operating the service will be responsible for maintenance. This is in accordance with the same rules that freight railroads currently are required to follow.

What will the fares be?

In preparing a business strategy to determine the viability of a Midwest system, a ticket pricing strategy was proposed that would allow projected revenues to meet and possibly exceed projected costs. Ticket prices were planned to be very competitive with the existing lowest discount airfare rates between cities. For example a round trip ticket between Indianapolis and Chicago would likely be in the \$75 to \$95 range. Pricing would be done according to a formula that would maximize ridership and revenues. With competitive pricing, a primary selling point for ridership would be the improved onboard amenities such as additional leg room, improved food and beverage services, and the additional flexibility to use electronic equipment, conduct on-board business meetings or just relax and enjoy the ground level view. Also, rail service offers a benefit to business and other travelers desiring downtown-to-downtown service.

What will the noise and vibration levels be for high-speed passenger trains in comparison with freight trains?

Newer high-speed rail trains, similar to those that are being considered for use in the Midwest, have had their noise levels measured at between 76 and 80 decibels from a distance of 100 feet. This is less than both current conventional Amtrak trains and current freight equipment due to the advanced new train set technology, modernized and quieter locomotives, and the increased passing speed of the high-speed trains. High-speed trains will likely be six to eight cars in length and will be able to pass a particular location in a matter of a few seconds. They also would likely only pass a particular location once every two hours or so.

Continuous welded rail (CWR) and new ballast would be installed throughout all corridors. Both improvements will minimize train noise and vibrations. The installation of CWR will substantially reduce the noise effect from the track not only from passenger trains but also with existing freight trains. Additionally, the weight of new, high technology passenger train sets will be substantially lighter than current trains, further assisting to lower noise and vibration.

Where and how often will whistles be used? What does Indiana law say about whistle blowing in Indiana communities?

High-speed trains will have to comply with the same local, state and federal laws that freight railroads follow. Improvements proposed at crossings to allow for high-speed trains may qualify some crossings for “quiet zone” status. The Federal Railroad Administration is currently considering rules for the development of such zones. It is anticipated that the FRA’s rules will only allow quiet zones in areas where other safety improvements offset the elimination of an audible horn warning. The implementation of a quiet zone would eliminate the need for whistle blowing by both passenger trains and freight trains (with the exception of emergency situations).